

Waverley Wildlife

Today's resident of Waverley area might be excused from thinking that the only animals to be found in their suburb are the neighbours' cats and dogs. However, it wasn't too long ago that horses were a common sight on the streets, dairy cattle grazed in grassy paddocks, and an ostrich farm occupied the scrub hills of Dover Heights. A world of wildlife is revealed in the municipality's archival records.

In 1887, Council's attention was called "to the number of cows and other animals allowed to stray and lie about the streets to the danger of persons having to traverse them, especially at night time.



The establishment of a Public Pound in Church Street, Waverley, was considered, and the following year a By-Law was written stating, "Any person who shall allow any kind of swine, horse, ass, mule, sheep, cow, goat or other animal belonging to him, or under his charge, to stray or go about, or to be tethered or depastured in any street, lane, or public place, shall be liable to a penalty not exceeding twenty shillings, nor less than five shillings. And in 1938, a complaint was made that "Varna Park is now openly used as a cow pasture. No attention is given to the herd by the owner, with the result that they wander at will out in the streets".

Horses provided transportation with "horse power", and blacksmiths and farriers abounded in place of today's service stations. All large homes had a sulky, buggy or phaeton. Hansom cabs and horse 'buses plied the streets. Black horses were sought by the undertakers to draw their hearses. In 1863, the cost of supplying Council with a horse, cart and driver was eleven shillings per day, and by 1914 the horse allowance was thirty nine pounds per year.

The keeping of pigs and chickens brought residents' complaints. A Mr Maddocks wrote in 1864 about the "nuisance arising from Mr W.B. Allen's piggery and requesting the appointment of an inspector of Nuisances". Another nuisance was, "caused by the keeping of fowls at 46 Blake Street and the erection of structures to house such fowls closer to a neighbour's residence than is allowed by law".

Occasionally, more exotic wildlife was lurking in the undergrowth, including blue-tongued lizards, "they were 15 inches long", in a Dover Heights vacant allotment, and "very large spiders" menacing Bondi Junction residents. Back in 1898, Alderman Hewlett suggested the advisability of allowing a few cows to graze in Waverley Park "on account of the overgrowing grass and it having been reported that snakes were seen in the Park".

On a happier note, ponies and donkeys were allowed to carry children on Bondi Beach, but Council firmly refused a request to use "camels for the purpose of carry-children". At Wonderland City, however, children rode on the back of "Alice, an Elephant in a Thousand". There were also performances by "Professor Godfrey's Dog and Monkey Circus", and the "Imperial Menagerie of Wild Beasts". But if that wasn't to your liking, the Bondi Aquarium offered, along with the usual sea creatures, "an exhibition of Performing Fleas".

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